

# Where Women Discourage Economy

By FRANCES L. GARSIDE



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MISS EDITH STRAUSS

**W**OMEN do 90 per cent of the retail buying in this country. Women complain of the present high prices. Yet a woman goes into a store and if a pair of shoes on one counter is marked twelve dollars, and a pair in a less conspicuous place, but identically like them, is marked nine dollars, she will look at both—and take the more expensive pair.

This is not an unwarranted charge against the women; it is a fact, founded on investigations made by Miss Edith Strauss, director of women's activities, High Cost of Living, Department of Justice, in Washington. She declares it hard to co-operate toward lowering of prices when people will not buy cheap things, but insist on getting the article that is higher priced. This has been demonstrated to Miss Strauss by the merchants in a number of ways. Miss Strauss estimates that women do 90 per cent of the buying, and she is directing her campaign particularly to them.

First as to rampant extravagance—data obtained from retailers:

"Retail merchants have come to me," said Miss Strauss, "and said, 'How can we co-operate when people will not buy the cheap things but insist on having the best that money can get?' I was told of a shoe factory which formerly made workmen's shoes exclusively but has practically discontinued that line because there was no market for such shoes, and is now turning out fancy, high-grade footwear for the same trade.

"A merchant in New York was trying to sell women's coats—a certain lot he had at \$35. They were fashionably made and a good value. He wondered why they would not go and asked a traveling salesman if he thought the reason was that they did not have fur collars and cuffs. The answer made was that the merchant had the coats marked too low; he was advised to put them at \$55 and see what would happen. He adopted the suggestion and had no trouble in selling the coats at the fancy figure.

"A Kansas merchant who desired to co-operate in our campaign to increase the buying of necessities by making prices more attractive and thus reduce the call for luxuries, marked up his silk stockings 25 per cent and marked down his cotton hose 20 per cent. In spite of this he could not meet the demand for silk stockings, while the cotton hosiery went begging.

"A test of extravagant tendencies was made in Boston by a shoe man. He was offering his shoes at a narrow margin of profit—comparatively speaking. Sales dragged. Two shoe-dealers on opposite sides of the street were selected for the experiment that was decided upon. They were close together, one of them occupied by the man referred to. Forty pairs of shoes of the same style and wholesale price were picked out. Twenty of them marked at \$14 a pair, were put in the show window of one of the stores and twenty marked \$9 a pair in the show window of the other store. Most of the shoes at \$14 a pair were sold before a single pair of the same shoes at \$9 a pair had been disposed of.

"This tendency to extravagance, in which, of course, many take no part, has been aggravated by the changed attitude of numerous wealthy people. During the war they set an example of economy, avoiding any display of fine apparel, and wearing old clothes. But these self-imposed restrictions were cast off when the war ended. Dr. Henry Van Dyke, in a letter to me on the work we are undertaking, says: 'The display of extravagance in dress, which may be seen in all our great cities, is not only an exhibition of folly, but also a direct incitement to envy and unrest among the poor. The latter, however, show that their objection to this kind of display is not truly philosophical by imitating it themselves as soon as they get a little money.'

"It would be a great help in checking extravagance if the rich would set the example they followed during the war. There is just as much need of this sort of thing now as there was when the fighting was going on."

Second, from the manufacturers' side—data dealing with wages and hours:

"Most of the manufacturers," said Miss Strauss, "make the same report, which is to the effect that there is no chance of any real reduction in the price of manufactured articles so long as demands for higher wages and shorter hours continue, because the cost of labor bears such a large part in the cost of manufacture. Reports are that wages are going up, that hours are being shortened and that efficiency is falling off. One manufacturer said that reducing a fifty-four hour week to forty-eight hours in his plants involved a loss in output for the year equivalent to stopping 8,000 looms capable of turning off over 40,000,000 yards in twelve months."

Third, from the consumers' side—data obtained from women's organizations:

"We are preaching to the women that the consumer's responsibility in reducing the cost of living is practically on their shoulders. Nine out of ten retail buyers are women, and the one immediate opportunity to bring prices down is by lessening demand, and by close and only necessary buying. There is no immediate chance that increased production will bring prices down appreciably. With the many labor troubles, we need not expect soon any notable gain in production, and if peace between labor and capital is obtained, it will probably be a year before the shortage in supplies in the world will be overtaken, if then.

"To this appeal we are receiving encouraging responses. We have taken our campaign to 10,000 federated women's clubs, representing 2,000,000 women, and to 10,875 independent women's clubs, representing more than 1,000,000. We want to reach every woman in America. A double appeal is made to them; first, to center on necessities, and then to report any exorbitant charges by local merchants. Such reports, however, should be made, not to us here in Washington, but to the local Fair Price Commissioner. A Department of Justice official will at once investigate and the accused will face a penalty of one year's imprisonment, or a \$5,000 fine. We are just starting in, but 300 arrests

have been made, and out of eight cases brought to trial all were found guilty.

"In committees where the Fair Price Committees are active, reductions in prices have been effected. In Baltimore, where there is an exceptionally good committee, out of 115 commodities there has been a drop from 2 to 35 per cent in 113 of them; the remaining two showed a slight increase.

"Here is an instance of women joining in the appeal to practice the closest economy. In Denver a large amount of meat was in storage; it was nutritious, but consisted chiefly of the cheaper cuts. The dealers said there was no use putting it on the market; that the people would not buy low grade meat. The United States District Attorney insisted, and 25,000 pounds were sold at the first marketing. There were two effects. The higher priced meat came down, and values in the cheaper cuts were shown by demonstration classes. The effect of these sales was a reduction in the price of meat in Denver.

"The National Retail Dry Goods Association, at a meeting held recently, agreed to co-operate with us in directing attention to necessities in contrast to luxuries. Places will be set aside in their stores for the display of articles plain but substantial at reasonable prices—things that will appeal to the buying public. This plan in itself, widely adopted in the stores of the country will have the effect of turning the attention from luxuries to necessities. The retail dealers also agree, by the adoption of resolutions, to feature in their show windows a complete outfit of clothing, suits, shoes, hats, underwear, that could be bought for \$100, plain but substantial. This is to be done for both men and women.

"What we have had is a wave of extravagance. The ideal was extravagance. What we need is a similar movement for economy, with the ideal of economy, as the first necessity in the change, taking the place of the ideal of extravagance. I think women more than men were responsible for the heavy-spending period, and through them I expect the change in attitude to be brought about."

## What Do You Know About Talc?

**A**MERICA leads the world in the talc and soapstone industry, not only in production but especially in manufacture and use. The output of talc in the United States sold in 1918 was 191,477 short tons, having an average value of \$10.91 a ton.

Vermont produces the largest quantity of talc, but the output of New York is of greater value. California ranks third in quantity and value and, notwithstanding the general decline in production elsewhere in the United States in 1918, it more than doubled its output of 1917.

The United States produced about 58 per cent of the world's output of talc in 1918 and in addition imported more than 11 per cent of all the talc produced by the rest of the world. As little if any talc was exported, it is evident that the United States is pre-eminently a consumer of talc.

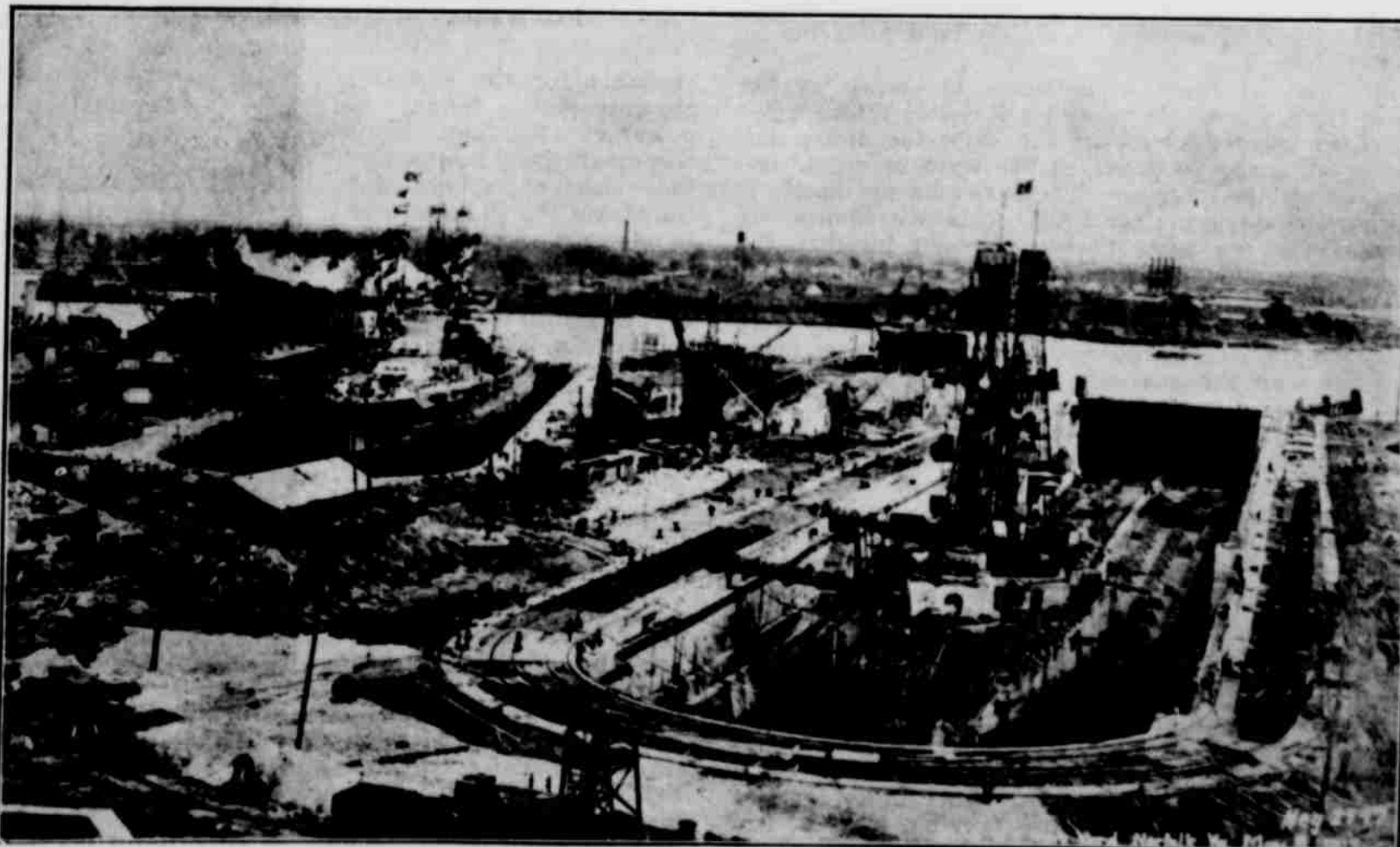
The United States is well supplied with low and middle grade talc but lacks high grade material for use

in toilet powder, electric insulators, and gas burners, commonly called lava tips. The talc used for such purposes is imported mainly from Italy and France and, through other countries, from India.

Within the last two years a new and interesting source of talc has been found in a large dike of serpentine in Hartford County, Maryland.

Virginia is the only great producer of soapstone in the world, shipping more than 15,000 tons in 1918. The production has, however, declined irregularly for the last 10 years. Soapstone is one of the rocks that are most widely useful to primitive peoples, who, on account of its softness, resistance to sudden changes of temperature, and slow radiation of heat, employ it chiefly as "potstone"—that is, for making pots. We make a similar use of it in soapstone stoves, foot warmers, and disks for fireless cookers, although in this country it is used principally in laundry tubs, laboratory tables, hoods, and sinks.

## Great Dry Dock Owned by the Government



The Dry Docks, at Norfolk, Virginia, are owned by the Government and are the latest to be opened. They were completed in less than a year, in them are the battleships Nevada and Wisconsin. The larger dock is 650 feet long and the smaller 550 feet. They are made of concrete, of which 60,000 cubic yards were used. They required 120,000 cubic feet of excavation.